

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

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Slightly Revised November 1998

Turkey Basics: Stuffing

Thermometer Essential When Stuffing a Turkey

If stuffing a turkey, use a meat thermometer. Cooking a home-stuffed turkey can be somewhat riskier than cooking one not stuffed. Bacteria can survive in stuffing which has not reached the safe temperature of 165 °F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness. Even if the turkey itself has reached the proper internal temperature of 180 °F in the innermost part of the thigh, the stuffing may not have reached a temperature in all parts of the stuffing sufficient to destroy foodborne bacteria.

If stuffing does not reach 165 °F when the turkey itself is done to 180 °F, further cooking will be required. During the added cooking necessary to bring the stuffing up to a safe temperature, the meat may become overcooked.

For optimal safety and uniform doneness, cook stuffing separately.

Frozen Turkeys Stuffed at the Plant Under USDA Inspection

Some turkeys purchased frozen have been stuffed at a plant under USDA inspection. These turkeys should be safe when cooked from the frozen state. Follow the manufacturer's package directions.

Stuffing Safely

For stuffing cooked in a turkey or in a casserole, some basic rules should be followed. Care must be taken at the following critical points during preparation, cooking, and handling.

1. Handling Raw Turkeys Safely

Immediately after grocery store checkout, take the turkey home and store it in the refrigerator or freezer. Cook a fresh turkey within 2 days or freeze it. Defrost frozen turkeys in the refrigerator, allowing 24 hours per 5 pounds.

For thawing in cold water, allow about 30 minutes per pound. The water should be changed every 30 minutes. A turkey may be thawed in the microwave following the oven manufacturer's instructions, but must be cooked immediately after thawing.

2. Prepare Stuffing Safely

Mix stuffing just before it goes into the turkey. The wet and dry ingredients can be prepared ahead of time and chilled. Mix ingredients just before placing the stuffing inside the turkey or into a casserole.

3. Stuffing Properly

The turkey should be stuffed loosely -- about 3/4 cup of stuffing per pound of turkey. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment.

4. Use a Thermometer

The stuffed turkey should be placed immediately in an oven set no lower than 325 °F. Even when using a "pop-up" temperature indicator, a conventional meat thermometer must be used to test in several places, including the innermost part of the thigh and the center of the stuffing. The bird is done when the thermometer temperature reaches at least 180 °F in the innermost part of the thigh. Juices should run clear. Cook until the center of the stuffing inside the turkey or in a casserole reaches 165 °F. Let bird stand for 20 minutes before removing all stuffing and carving.

5. Storing Leftovers

Within 2 hours of cooking, cut turkey off the bones. Refrigerate stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within 4 days.

Call Toll-free For More Information

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